

Police Culture

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THE POLICE COMMISSIONER ISSUED THE FOLLOWING DIRECTIVE TO THE CHIEF OF OPERATIONS:

“Tomorrow evening at approximately 2000 hours, Haley’s Comet will be visible in this area, as event which occurs only once every 75 years. Have the men assemble in front of the station house in uniform and I will explain this rare phenomenon to them. In case of rain we will not be able to see anything, so assemble the men in the sitting room and I will show them films of it.”

THE CHIEF OF OPERATIONS DIRECTED THE AREA COMMANDER:

“By order of the Police Commissioner: Tomorrow at 2000 hours Haley’s Comet will appear above the station house. If it rains, fall the men out in uniform and then march to the sitting room where the rare phenomenon will take place, something which occurs only once every 75 years.”

THE AREA COMMANDER ORDERED THE PRECINCT COMMANDING OFFICER:

“By order of the Police Commissioner in uniform at 2000 hours tomorrow evening the phenomenal Halley’s Comet will appear in the sitting room. In case of rain in front of the station house, the Police Commissioner will give another order, something which occurs once every 75 years.”

THE PRECINCT COMMANDING OFFICER ISSUED THE FOLLOWING ORDER TO THE ADMINISTRATIVE LIEUTENANT:

“Tomorrow at 2000 hours, the Police Commissioner will appear in front of the station house with Halley’s Comet, something which happens every 75 years. If it rains, the Police Commissioner will order the Comet into the sitting room.”

THE ADMINISTRATIVE LIEUTENANT MADE THE FOLLOWING ANNOUNCEMENT AT ROLL CALL:

“When it rains tomorrow at 2000 hours, the phenomenal 75 year old Chief Halley, accompanied by the Police Commissioner will drive his Comet through the station house in uniform.”

AN HOUR LATER ONE OF THE COPS ASKED THE SERGEANT FOR CLARIFICATION OF THE LIEUTENANT'S ANNOUNCEMENT AT ROLL CALL AND THE SERGEANT SAID:

“Chief Halley, the new Area Commander, is going to test a new RMP [patrol car] here tomorrow, if it doesn't rain.”

A SHORT TIME LATER, A P.A.A. [CIVILIAN EMPLOYEE] ASKED THE COP IF HE KNEW WHAT WAS GOING TO HAPPEN TOMORROW, THE COP SAID:

“Forget it, you civilians can't get anything straight anyway.”

— Anonymous Graffiti from the NYPD

From *Two Cultures of Policing* by Elizabeth Reuss-Ianni (1983)

Some Main Points

- In there a Cops' Code? Is it unique?
- Blue Wall of Silence (or Ignorance?)
- Grass Eaters vs. Meat Eaters.
- Rotten Apple in an otherwise clean barrel?
- Dirty Harry/Noble Cause Corruption.
- Some corruption inevitable (like “shrinkage” in business).

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The Cop's Code

Reuss-Ianni, Elizabeth. 1993. *Two Culture of Policing: Street and Management Cops*. New Brunswick: Transaction.

- Watch out for your partner first and then the rest of the guys working that tour
- Don't give up another cop
- Show balls.
- Be aggressive when you have to, but don't be too eager.
- Don't get involved in anything in another guy's sector.
- Hold up your end of the work
- If you get caught off base, don't implicate anybody else

The Cops' Code—within the squad

- Make sure the other guys know if another cop is dangerous or “crazy.”
- Don't trust a new guy until you have checked him out
- Don't tell anybody else more than they have to know, it could be bad for you and it could be bad for them.
- Don't talk too much or too little.
- Don't leave work for the next tour.

The Cops' Code—dealing with bosses

- Protect your ass.
- Don't make waves.
- Don't give them too much activity.
- Keep out of the way of any boss from outside your precinct.
- Know your bosses: “Who is working today?”
- Don't do the bosses' work for them.
- Don't trust bosses to look out for your interest.

What Makes a Code?

- Is this unique to the police world?

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What Makes a Code?

- Is this unique to the police world?
- Danger as part of the job.
- Danger combined with authority contribute to a sense of solidarity, isolation, and dependence on each other: hence suspiciousness, clannishness, and secrecy.

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Blue Silence or Purposeful Ignorance?

- Guilt by association.
- Great pressure to see and hear no evil.
- It's easy not to know!
- Are police family or friends? You can pick your friends but not your family.

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Eras of Public Employment

- Patronage and "honest graft"
- The "Progressive" Vision of Corruption Control
Civil service, meritocracy, "scientific" administration, bureaucracy, regulation, centralization.
- Today's model?
Professionalism, financial disclosure...

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Morality and the police job

- Vollmer believed that officers should view police work as a moral commitment, not simply a job.
- "Professionalism" shifted the idea of police work from a political job to a moral commitment. The rise of civil service and unions shifted the job to work.

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Should Police Say No When...?

- Something offered because recipient is police?
- Something offered on regular basis?
- Value of something disproportionate to services rendered?
- Something offered to secure certain services?
- Something offered by unauthorized person?
- What is the something?

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Corruption and Culture

- What is the difference between being non-judgmental and covering-up?
- To demand that observers of misdeeds come forward when they witness misdeeds is to be ignorant and contemptuous of group/friendship loyalty.
- Peer pressure and police culture is more powerful than any set of rules. The current system reinforces a code of silence.
- Can you have loyalty and pride without a blue wall of silence?

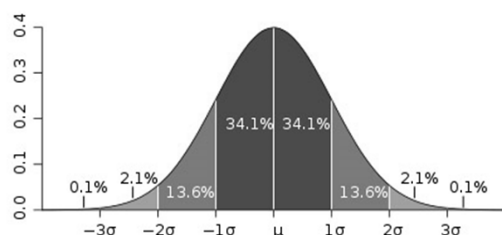
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Free Coffee & the Slippery Slope

- Slippery slope implies that cops *become* corrupt (not born that way). Is this true?
- Is corruption different than crime?
- A corrupt cop probably wouldn't even think about a free cup of coffee anyway.
- The slippery slope argument only works *if* a free cup of coffee is defined as corruption. What about not filling out "run sheets"? What about minor regulations. Why the focus on *coffee* if there are so many other ways to slide down the slope?

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Targeted versus General Solutions Bell Curve and Standard Deviation



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Targeted versus general solutions

- The transitive property says that if $X = Y$ and $Y = Z$, then $X = Z$ (corruption).
- If Z is corruption, should we get rid of X?
- What if X is citizen contact? What if Y happens to be good?
- What if Z results from X but *only 0.01% of the time*?

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Anticorruption & the Pathologies of Bureaucracy

The Pursuit of Absolute Integrity: How Corruption Control Makes Government Ineffective (Frank Anechiarico & James B. Jacobs, 1996)

- Over-centralization
- Decision-Making Delay
- Defensive Management
- Goal Displacement
- Poor Morale
- Barriers to Organizational Cooperation
- Adaptive Strategies

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Police Prosecutions

- Rare, but they do happen.
- Civil Suits against the Police generally need to show *negligent* training, supervision, or retention.

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Investigative Commissions...

- ...Have no power to directly punish or correct the police department. They have no teeth.
- ...Do help define extent and nature of police corruption.

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Investigative Commission

Ad hoc body, appointed in response to a specific incident

- **Wickersham Commission** 1931 – Prohibition
- **Knapp Commission** 1972 – Frank Serpico, David Durk, NYPD
- **Mollen** 1992 – NYPD, silent about others (*crimes of omission/failure to act*)
- **Christopher Commission** – Rodney King

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Wickersham Commission (1931)

- Very much in the “progressive” model.
- Documented widespread evasion of prohibition and the counterproductive effects it had on American society.
- Recommended *more* aggressive and extensive law enforcement to force compliance.
- On interrogation: “The third degree--the inflicting of pain, physical or mental, to extract confessions or statements--is widespread throughout the country.”

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Wickersham Commission (1931)

- Franklin Adams’s (*New York World* Columnist) poem:

Prohibition is an awful flop.
We like it.
It can't stop what it's meant to stop.
We like it.
It's left a trail of graft and slime,
It won't prohibit worth a dime,
It's filled our land with vice and crime.
Nevertheless, we're for it.

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Knapp Commission (1972)

“**Grass Eaters**” are police officers who “accept gratuities and solicit five, ten, twenty dollar payments from contractors, tow-truck operators, gamblers, and the like but do not pursue corruption payments.”

Grass eating is something that a significant number of officers are guilty of, but which they learned to do so from other cops or from imitating the deviants they watch and investigate every day.

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Knapp Commission (1972)

“**Meat Eaters**” are officers who “spend a good deal of time aggressively looking for situations they can exploit for financial gain.” An example of this is shaking down pimps and drug dealers for money not only for the material profit to the officers, but for the relief from guilt that the officers derive by convincing themselves that their victims deserve such treatment. They justify taking advantage of criminals because they are considered the dregs of society.

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Mollen Commission (1992)

“Today’s corruption is not the corruption of Knapp Commission days. Corruption then was largely a corruption of accommodation, of criminals and police officers giving and taking bribes, buying and selling protection. Corruption was, in its essence, consensual. Today’s corruption is characterized by brutality, theft, abuse of authority and active police criminality.”

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Noble Cause Corruption

- Noble Cause: A profound moral commitment to make the world a safer place.
- Noble Cause different than plain old-fashioned brutality or corruption for personal gain. Not grass eating or meat eating.

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John Van Maanen & “the Asshole”

- Three types of citizens
 - 1) suspicious persons
 - 2) know nothings
 - 3) assholes



John Van Maanen is actually a very nice guy!

		Does the person know what he or she is doing?	
		YES	NO
Under the circumstances, Could the person act differently?	YES	Assholes: Castigate, Beat, Arrest	(Protesters:) Teach
	NO	(Crime victims, saving face:) Ignore	(Crazy person, child, drunk:) Isolate

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Suspicious Persons

- *Suspicious persons* are stopped and interrogated. It is not their moral worth or identity that is at issue, but rather the possible illegal action in their immediate or not-so-immediate past.
- Guilt may still be in question, or, if their guilt has been established, their actions are likely to seem at least comprehensible and purposeful to the police.

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The Know Nothing

- The *know nothing* is an “average” citizen. Most likely police deal with them only via their request for service. May be injured or a victim or seek information.
- Least likely candidate for street justice.

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Assholes

- *Assholes*, by contrast, are stigmatized by the police and treated harshly based on their failure to meet police expectations arising from the interaction situation itself.
- Most vulnerable to street justice, since they, as their title implies, are not granted status as stupid or senseless and their feelings as incomprehensible.

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Maintain the edge: Activity which may threaten the perceived order becomes intolerable

- For it signifies to the patrolman that his advantage over the conduct of others (his “edge”) is in question. It is a source of embarrassment in front of a public audience. It is potentially a threat.
- To let down the façade is to invite disrespect, chaos, and crime.

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The Moral Mandate

- Police represent the moral order and are a part of it.
- Every situation in which the police and public interact will end in one of just three possible options:
 - 1) The citizen leaves
 - 2) The citizen shows deference to police officer
 - 3) The citizen is arrested

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The Road to Assholddom

- If the affront is viewed as unavoidable or unintended, perhaps no big deal. The asshole, however, is one who is viewed as culpable and blameworthy.
- Labeling a person as an asshole can be useful in providing distance between themselves and their segmented audiences—to be liked by the people in the street is a sign of a bad cop.
- “I will teach you to respect my authority!”

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Howard Becker’s Labeling Theory

- Deviance is not a quality of the act the person commits, but rather a consequence of the application by others of rules and sanctions to an offender. The deviant is one to whom that label has successfully been applied. Labeling Theory focuses on the reaction of other people and the subsequent effects of those reactions which create deviance.

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Howard Becker’s Labeling Theory

- When it becomes known that a person has engaged in deviant acts, she or he is then segregated from society and thus labeled, “whore,” “thief,” “abuser,” “junkie,” and the like. Becker noted that this process of segregation creates “outsiders”, who are outcast from society, and then begin to associate with other individuals who have also been cast out.

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Paradoxes of coercive power

William Ker Muir, Jr. 1977. *Police: Streetcorner Politicians*.

- The citizen is, relative to the policeman, the more dispossessed, the more detached, the nastier, and the crazier. Add to these natural advantages the fact that most police-citizen encounters are begun under circumstances which the citizen has determined.
- Police prefer to be wrong (treating a good person bad) than dead wrong (treating a bad person good). This is regardless of the odds that a person is good or bad.

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Paradoxes of coercive power

William Ker Muir, Jr. 1977. *Police: Streetcorner Politicians*.

- 1) dispossession (skid row--nothing to lose),
- 2) detachment (family beef--if you don't care about something, it's easy to hurt it),
- 3) face (crowd scene--the nastier one's reputation, the less nasty one has to be),
- 4) irrationality (juvenile caper--the more delirious the threatener, the more serious the threat; the more delirious the victim, the less serious the threat).

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Inherently Corrupting?

William Ker Muir, Jr. 1977. *Police: Streetcorner Politicians*.

Means-End conflict, or passion vs. perspective

- 1) If you do the legal thing and let a guilty person go, you've corrupted your own morals.
- 2) If you do the illegal thing and convict a guilty guy, you've committed a criminal act.

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Police Power

- 1) Truth
- 2) Coercion
- 3) Trade

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